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Copey is, probably, the aboriginal or Carib name of the plant, which, like many others, has been retained. Scotch lawyer, or Scotch attorney, by which name it is known in Jamaica, is not altogether flattering to legal gentlemen of Caledonian extraction.

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## THE MOTTLED OWL.

BY DR. W. WOOD.

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OF the genus *Scops*, there are some twenty-five or thirty species in all parts of the globe, only one of which, according to Cassin, is found in New England. From the time of Pennant till they were separated by the Prince of Canino (Charles Lucien Bonaparte), the mottled (*Strix Asio*) and the red owl (*Strix Nævia*) were considered two distinct species: since that time, the writers on ornithology—so far as I have been able to learn—consider them the same bird. Some, and probably the most, believe that the mottled is the adult, and the red the young, while others are equally sanguine that the reverse is true. Brewer, in his synopsis of the birds of North America, says that the red-plumaged bird is the adult. In his opinion he is sustained by Doctor Cabot, of Boston, and many other distinguished naturalists. Audubon says, "The red owl of Wilson and other naturalists is merely the young of the bird called by the same authors the mottled owl." Cassin, in the Pacific Railroad Report (vol. ix, p. 52), agrees with Audubon, yet says "the two stages of plumage described above (adult and young) have been regarded as characterizing distinct species, and they do present a problem scarcely to be considered as fully solved." And furthermore he says, "this bird pairs and rears young while in the red plumage, and it is not unusual to find a mottled male and red female associated or the reverse." While Audubon says, "By the middle of August they are

fully feathered, and are then generally of the color exhibited in the plate (red). The feathers change their color as the pairing season advances, and in the first spring the bird is in perfect dress (gray).” How, then, can a gray and red pair, as the young never pair until the following spring? From the above quotations you perceive that there is a great difference among scientific ornithologists as to which is the adult and which is the young;—and, if it will not seem egotistical, allow me to say that I believe all are right and all are wrong; for, according to my investigations, there is an adult red and an adult gray, and also a young red and a young gray. As “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” is or should be the only desideratum known among naturalists, I propose to give my experience and observations, hoping to elucidate the subject somewhat, intending still to prosecute my researches until the identity or non-identity is settled beyond dispute. A writer in the transactions of the Academy of Sciences of Philadelphia, vol. 8, p. 53, expresses my views on the subject. He says that “the color of both young and old is variable and uncertain, or else they are specifically distinct, having observed both the old and young of the Mottled-gray Owl, neither of which had the slightest shade of red about them;” and I can add, that I have not only observed the same, but also the adult Red on her nest with red young. In my collection is a Mottled Owl that was taken from her nest in a hollow tree that she had occupied several years with one of her young, neither of which had a red feather on them. I have also a Red Owl that was taken from her nest by a farmer who informed me that she had nested close by his house in the same hollow tree four or five years, and that he had been in the habit of taking her out and showing her to his friends, but having a brood of chickens disappear suddenly, he supposed this owl was the thief. In answer to my interrogations, he said she had always the same red color. In the spring of 1860, I found a Red Owl on her nest with four

young under her: the latter were quite young, yet had the reddish tinge wherever the down was superseded by feathers. I stuffed one of them and kept the other three four months, when it was difficult to distinguish them from the adult bird. From the above it is evident that there are two adults, at least from three to five years old, the one red without a gray feather; the other gray without the slightest shade of red; also, the young of each before they could fly, one pure gray and white without a red feather, the other with a reddish tinge to all the feathers. These facts I am unable to reconcile unless it is admitted that the color of the plumage is either "variable and uncertain," or else, that there are two distinct species as described by Wilson in his American Ornithology.

In the fall of 1860 I wrote to my friend, Dr. S. W. Wilson, St. Simon's Island, Geo., who is an experienced ornithologist, and who has an extensive aviary, relating my investigations, and soliciting his observations as to the identity or non-identity of the Mottled and Red Owls, and received the following reply: "I will as far as I am able dispose of the Owl question. I feel that I can speak almost authoritatively in the matter from the number of observations I have made of each species. Fortunately, both the species to which you refer are abundant here, and I have no hesitation in saying that Wilson described them accurately, and subsequent naturalists have erred in considering them under one species. I have observed the old owls of each species feeding their young, noticed the change of plumage in the latter, and have on many occasions taken them from a hollow to secure their eggs, and have invariably found one species red, the other gray."

As the habits, manner of nesting, and appearance of the eggs are the same in both stages of plumage, or in the two species, the same general description will suffice for one or both. The Little Screech-owl, as it is commonly called, is found more or less numerous in all parts of the United

States, and extends its migration as far north as Greenland. In the States on the Atlantic coast, it is more numerous than any of the family *Strigidae*. Although this species is not considered by many ornithologists migratory, yet from my own observations I believe that most of them leave us in the winter; for while they are frequently taken here during the spring, summer, and fall months, they are seldom found in the winter. Wilson considered the Mottled Owl a native of the northern regions, extending its migrations as far south as Pennsylvania in winter, yet the Red Owl he believes is not migratory.

It is said that its power of vision is so imperfect that it will suffer itself sometimes to be taken in the hand when found away from its retreat in a clear day. That it can be taken in that way I know by experience, yet it does not necessarily follow that it is owing to defective vision. Like the preceding owl, it can see tolerably well at noonday. One that I let loose in my office flew against the window with such force as to break the glass, through which he escaped, and alighted on the limb of a tree some twenty rods distant, as readily as any bird could. Seeing me coming with a gun, he flew into a dove-hole in the barn. This occurred in the middle of the day, when the sun was shining clearly. Another that I kept in a cage would greedily seize his meat in broad daylight, and eye me closely when approaching with his morsel, snapping its bill after the manner of owls. Three that I tamed would come at call any time of the day from their perch in the barn. The probability is, that the owl, previously to being taken by hand, has gorged itself with food until unable to fly to its hiding-place, and thus remains almost stupid during the day. The hawk will sometimes gluttonize itself so that you can approach very near it before it will attempt to fly. The Screech-owl, like all nocturnal birds of prey, mostly secures its food at twilight, and the bird that has sat with eyes half-closed and head drawn down as though asleep during the day, is now active and vigilant,

catching its game, which consists of small birds, mice, crickets, beetles, and other insects. These are swallowed mostly whole, and afterwards the bones, feathers, hairs, etc., are ejected in the form of pellets. As a caterer this harmless little owl is not excelled by any of its genus.

It is difficult to describe the cry of this bird; sometimes it sounds like a child crying, then again like the syllable *hō-hō-hō-hō-hō-hō-hō* in quick succession with the quivering sound, or as Wilson admirably describes it: "It reminds one of the shivering moanings of a half frozen puppy. These notes you hear in the spring during pairing season, and also when the young have recently left the nest. They are generally answered by the mate or by the young. Last spring meeting one of my neighbors in the morning he inquired if my child was sick? I replied in the negative, and asked him why he thought so? He said 'I heard a child cry almost all night, and it appeared to come from your house!' Soon another accosted me like the first, and he was positive that the crying came from the same source. The mystery was soon explained when I informed them that a young Screech-owl was the sole occupant of a box eight inches square under my waggon-seat. By the superstitious, this wailing cry about the house is considered the forerunner of death. On visiting one of my patients I found the mother in tears, wringing her hands and moaning piteously, when she informed me that her child must die, for an owl had been near the window and cried almost all night. I endeavored to pacify the good lady by assuring her that her child would recover, but all to no purpose, for she believed the owl was a sure messenger of death, and no earthly power could avert it. The child recovered, and although seven years have elapsed, no member has yet obeyed the summons of the owl, yet the superstitious dame is hourly expecting that some one must go soon."

One of the Latin poets, in alluding to the cry of the owl says,—

*"Est illis strigibus nomen; sed nominis hujus  
Causa quod horrenda stridere nocte solent."*

But I can say, in the language of Cowper,—

“The jay, the pie, and e’en the boding owl,  
That hails the rising moon, have charms for me:  
Sounds inharmonious in themselves and harsh,  
Yet heard in scenes where peace forever reigns,  
And only these, please highly for their sake.”

The Screech-owl breeds in hollow trees, more commonly the apple tree, often but a few feet from the ground. Their nest is composed of grass, leaves, and feathers, and contains from four to six white eggs, nearly round. There is no apparent difference in the eggs of the Red and Mottled Owl. Wishing to obtain the eggs of the Red Owl, I requested a friend to secure me some from a nest that had been occupied by the same pair for years. Thrusting his hand into the hole, he withdrew it again in a hurry. In looking into the aperture, the eyes and ears of an owl were quite apparent, but the feathers were fur. The occupant proved to be Mrs. Puss, with her family of four kittens. This is the second instance of the kind that has come to my knowledge, and no doubt the *modus operandi* by which this transformation occurs can be easily explained by the superstitious, as did the ancients the metamorphosing of Jupiter into a bull.

[This article was received May 16th, and put in type before Mr. Allen’s “Notes,” given in the August number, were received.—EDITORS.]

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## REVIEWS.

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THE POPULAR SCIENCE REVIEW, in the July number, contains a lecture by Professor Huxley “On the Animals which are most nearly intermediate between Birds and Reptiles.” Such connecting links do not now exist, but the lecturer finds traces of such links in the fossil *Iguanodon*, and other Dinosaurians, in the Pterodactyle, and especially in the feathered reptile-like bird, *Archæopteryx*, of the Oölite formation; and in the animals, some bird-like, others reptile-like, which lived during the Triassic period in the Connecticut Valley.

I have now, I hope, redeemed my promise to show that, in times past, birds more like reptiles than any now living, and reptiles more like birds than any now living, did really exist. But, on the mere doctrine of chances, it would be the height of improbability that the couple